

MINUTES OF THE ASCENSION ISLAND COUNCIL (AIC)

MEETING HELD IN THE COURT HOUSE,

Monday, 24th August at 09:00hrs

Present: (by telephone) HE Governor, Mark Capes
Marc Holland, Administrator
Walter Scott, Solicitor General
Jamie Manson, Director of Resources
Councillor Samantha Arms-Lawrence
Councillor Nicholas John
Councillor Cyril Leo
Councillor Larry Poultney
Councillor Caroline Yon

Apologies: Nicola Moore, Attorney General
Councillor Jacqui Ellick
Councillor Keturah George

In attendance: Nicola Dillon, Clerk of Council

1. Introductions

The Administrator welcomed members to the meeting, including the Governor who was present after a few months' absence. The Governor was pleased to be back with Council and he passed on apologies from the Attorney General, who had been called away on urgent business. The Solicitor General was present and took the place of the Attorney General¹ for this meeting. The Governor made reference to the busy agenda which was before members, which included an update on fisheries. The Administrator concluded introductions by giving a brief overview of the morning's agenda, at the end of which there would be a closed session regarding an update on 2016 Access. Council had previously prepared for the meeting at a restricted informal meeting on 21 August.

2. Confirmation of Minutes

The minutes of the Ascension Island Council meeting which was held on Thursday, 25 June 2015, were confirmed.

Apologies were made to Cllr Leo, whose letter (annex A in the confirmed minutes) still required a response. The Governor said that he would look into this as a response had been drafted but had not been finalised.

Action: to provide a response to Cllr Leo's letter presented at the Island Council meeting on 25 June

3. Matters Arising

The Administrator explained that there were a number of follow up issues from the last two meetings and he said that the Director of Resources (DoR) had offered to provide a written response which would address these issues and would form part of the minute.

3.1 Draft Employment Ordinance

In relation to the draft Employment Ordinance, Cllr Leo asked for clarity about whether the US Base was represented at the Heads of Sheds' forum as there was concern by constituents living on

¹ Island Government (Ascension) Ordinance, 2008, Section 12(8)

the US Base about various employment issues, one of the main issues being employee gratuities. Cllr Leo asked whether there could be some preliminary discussions about gratuities with the new Contractor at the US Base, rather than wait for what could be a long drawn out process while work continued on the Employment Ordinance. He explained that the US Base gratuity scheme was different to other local organisations and people have expressed an interest in having the same system in place across employers.

The Solicitor General (SG) said that usually gratuity arrangements were civil agreements between employers and employees; however, he said he would look at the Employment Ordinance to see if it could be structured to make this a statutory requirement. In the meantime, he asked Cllr Leo to provide him with more information about the disparity between US Base employees and other organisations.

Actions:

1. DoR to provide a written response to 'matters arising' for the record.
2. Cllr Leo to provide information to the SG regarding the disparity in local gratuities.

4. Food Supply

AIG was considering its future food supply after the RMS is discontinued. The Administrator said that on 21 September he wrote to the Board of Directors of Solomon & Company, PLC to ask them to state their intentions with regards the future operation of the shop. The letter asked for a response from the Board by 21 September to give an indication of their plans, so that AIG could take contingency measures as required.

Councillors were given a copy of a report by Stephen Herron (SH) who visited Ascension in July and looked at food production. The Administrator said that the paper concluded that Ascension was not suffering from a food shortage but that there was more of a problem with the current supply chain, storage and management of Solomon's shop – how it is done, rather than the fundamentals. There was also a clear need for on-island production of fresh fruit and vegetable on a small scale, which SH felt had good chance of success. The Governor was very interested to read the report; St Helena was also looking to expand its food production and would also find the report useful.

The Administrator said that Council was being asked to make a decision on which of the models to pursue and the timing was critical as the island needed to have some food supply measures in place by May, which was the final call of the RMS from South Africa. He explained that it would take about 5 months to get to a stage where the first crops are produced.

The Administrator and DoR took Council through options for future food production using hydroponics, which included examination of a private model and a public model. Council was given a financial analysis of the two models and the risks involved with both. The private model required AIG to underwrite a large proportion of the capital investment and yielded a low profit. The financial forecast for this venture seemed quite fragile with very modest figures. If the venture failed, AIG would have to underwrite up to two-thirds of the investment plus an overdraft. The public model would be funded and managed by AIG and would require a capital investment of £46.5K. A financial analysis of this model showed that this was a less risky option and would yield a higher profit.

Given the evidence that was provided, AIG felt the public model provided the most value for money and was more geared towards local demand. The Governor commended the work that had gone into the analysis and said that given the circumstances of Ascension he agreed that public sector ownership was the way to go. Councillors also agreed with the view that a public model was a safer, less risky option.

It was agreed that AIG would pursue a public model. The DoR set out an option to get consultant support for the first few weeks of operation, through to the first crop and AIG would aim to have this model up and running by the time the RMS ceases. The tender process would extend to the parties who were involved in the analysis and also look at potential interest in St Helena.

Actions:

1. To send a copy of the report to the Governor (Amy Soar).
2. DoR and Amy Soar would take the project forward to the next stage, the tender process.

5. Fisheries

Offshore Fishery

This was a topic that had been high on the Council agenda for many months. Recent communication by the Foreign Office highlighted the HMG manifesto commitment; however, there was currently no funding available to support Ascension if it declared an MPA (Marine Protected Area). The Administrator said that it was important for Council to reiterate its position so that the Governor had clear advice on what the Council's policy intent was.

Council discussed the Blue Marine Foundation (BMF) option, who offered to finance a pause in the fishery for a further 1-2 years on the provision of working towards an MPA. Cllr Yon told Council that part of the problem was that there had been no commitment that any funding they gave would be long-term and no funding was available for enforcement. The problem that Council faced was that without a proper partnership and a commitment to funding, this would be an issue as Government had to balance its books.

Prior to the meeting Councillors had drafted a letter of response to correspondence received from the Acting Minister, Mr Grant Shapps in relation to reopening a fishery on the island.

The question was put to Council that the letter, dated 24 August, to Mr Shapps was a true representation of Council's policy intent on offshore fishing, which was to work towards reopening a fishery.

All 6 Councillors present voted in favour of the policy intent as set out in the letter.

The letter would be sent to the Governor's office immediately following the meeting and the Governor would prepare a cover letter to accompany the letter to Mr Shapps. The Administrator said that the fisheries team had a mandate to continue with preparations for a fishery. Cllr Yon would respond to BMF to outline the Council's position.

Actions:

1. To send the Councillors' letter to the Governor for forwarding on to the Acting Minister, Mr Grant Shapps.
2. Councillor Yon would write to BMF to update them on the Island Council's position

Inshore Fishery

The Inshore Advisory Committee and the Fisheries Directorate had worked together to develop the policy content for licencing. At a recent informal meeting, there was concern about some of the content and it was agreed that the Fisheries Directorate would continue to put the legislation together with support from the Inshore Advisory Committee and the Island Council's Biodiversity and Fisheries Protection Committee and in consultation with Councillors. This would enable councillors to take time to understand the content of the policy decisions of the proposed licences.

6. PricewaterhouseCoopers Tax Report

The FCO commissioned a review on the island's taxation system by PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) and a team visited the island earlier this year. The report had been received and was circulated to Council. In normal circumstances, this would be the centrepiece for discussion, but due to other more pressing issues taking precedence it meant that Council had a little longer to consider the report.

The DoR said for a small island there was quite a complicated taxation system and the scope of the

review was to evaluate the current practice and how it operated and to identify a set of guiding principles for the island's tax policy. It was also intended to identify options for reforming the tax system and to modernise the administration of taxes, fees and charges imposed by AIG.

The report offered 3 sets of recommendations ranging from staying with the status quo with a few modifications through to a total structural reform. AIG was currently considering the proposals and would return to the Island Council with its intended approach and a plan for its implementation. DoR said that one of the biggest problems that he foresaw was the lack of capacity within AIG to take the recommendations forward.

Action: AIG to consider the review and to revert to Council with its recommended approach

7. Bicentenary & Children's park

The Administrator took Council through the arrangements for the Bicentenary, which was two months away.

Bicentenary Park

Work on the park was progressing well and would be completed ahead of schedule as most of the significant construction work was finished and there was only the 'cosmetics' and finishing touches to do. The monument was on island and would be installed at the end of September when the designer arrived on Ascension. The designer would also be bringing a plaque which he had designed, which would be fitted inside the gazebo to commemorate the opening of the park by Commodore Darren Bone of the Royal Navy. Although there has been some minor changes in the design of the park, due to a shortage of resources and materials or a chance to use something on-island, the overall expenditure had remained on target with some reserves for minor works ahead of the Bicentenary weekend.

Bicentenary Events

A copy of the programme for the Bicentenary Weekend (22-25 October) was circulated to councillors. The weekend's events offered a range of entertainment for the whole community and had been planned in close cooperation with volunteers, the RAF and the US Base. The main challenges have been to secure volunteers to provide food and drink at events and to engage musicians for the 'Party in the Park' event.

Children's Park

Work has started on the children's park in Georgetown and the plan was to renovate the area and to ensure that children have a safe and stimulating area to play in the centre of town. The original completion date for the park was 1 October 2015 but due to shipping schedules and other demands, this date had been revised and it was aimed to have the park completed by the Governor's visit in November. The budget for the park was £85K, however, due to savings made from donations of concrete from island contractors, plus a discount from Playdale the suppliers of the play equipment, and with the remaining expenditure expected to be around £2.1K, the overall expenditure was anticipated to be less than budgeted for.

Cllr Leo said that with all of the uncertainties within the community he recognised that the organisers had a difficult task in getting community support. However, the organisers were to be commended for all the hard work that had been put into the organisation of these events and he hoped that the community would participate.

8. Lifeboat Refit

Following a recent visit to the Island of some trainers from Sea Training International Ltd who carried out essential training for the rescue services it was identified that the sea rescue boat was not fit for purpose. Much of the training that was carried out involved using the sea rescue boat and the training highlighted a fundamental safety issue with the boat and as a result measures are being put in place for an urgent capital bid to bring the vehicle up to the required safety standard. The problem with the boat is that the petrol tank and electrical wiring are located in the control console, which is a potential safety

hazard as research has highlighted several cases where boats have exploded. The current boat is 11 years old and the bid sought capital funding of £85.5K to cover essential repairs and an upgrade, which would be carried out by the manufacturers in the UK.

While the boat was out of service, sea rescue cover was being provided by the Wide-awake, the Queen Atlantis and potentially the Conservation rib. The proposal was to have the work completed and the boat back in service by December. The upgrade would extend the boat's lifetime by another five years and increase its resale value.

In order to facilitate the funding, Council was asked to consider a Supplementary Appropriation Ordinance, to increase the amounts provided for the services of Ascension Island for the financial year 1 April 2015 to 31 March 2016.

- i. The Ascension Island Supplementary Ordinance, 2015**
Council was asked to vote on the Ordinance and all six councillors voted to recommend the Ordinance to the Governor for enactment.

Action: To enact the Ascension Island Supplementary Ordinance, 2015

9. Cinema Update

At the previous meeting in June councillors asked for an update on the cinema project, which the Administrator provided in a memo to Council. He told councillors that there was still a good chance that the cinema would be open in October despite some delays caused by technical and shipping issues. It was hoped that the equipment would arrive in September, so that installation could begin soon after and the project completed in time for the Bicentenary. AIG had made an initial contribution of £23K as previously agreed, but had not made any further financial contribution.

10. Any Other Business

10.1. Update on Digital TV Service

Cllr Yon asked for an update on when the digital TV service would be in place. The Administrator said that it was scheduled on ships and technicians being available, but as far as he was aware it was still scheduled to go live on 1 October.

There was no further business and the meeting drew to a close at 10.35hrs.

Nicola Dillon
Clerk of Council

ANNEX A

Matters Arising Update for Island Council – August 2015

Hospital - Caesarean Sections and Inductions:

- Concerns were raised at the June Council about the number of caesarean sections being carried at Georgetown Hospital. The Senior Medical Officer explained that due to the low number of births on Ascension, it is not possible to ascertain whether the level of C-sections is above average – which ranges from 12-60% in the UK.
- The DoR has explored the issues with the Senior Medical Officer who explained that rigorous procedures are followed in the event of every birth. A standard partograph tracks the progress of every labour. An action line indicates when intervention is required if progress does not proceed at the expected rate. The SMO is acutely aware of the risks involved in performing a C-section, but this is balanced against the risks to baby and mother if the labour is allowed to proceed, and is judged to be less the risky option.
- Inductions are also used to help maintain progress with the labour, only being used as necessary when the alert line is passed on the partograph. An induction was used just before the SMO left the island on overseas leave to make sure that mother and baby were ok in the immediate period after the birth.

Hospital - Confidentiality:

- The DoR flagged that confidentiality had also been raised as a concern and the SMO agreed to remind all staff of their obligations as medical professionals in their team meetings.

Cover for Dentist's Absence

- The DoR explained that, in line with previous years, we sought cover for Johnny Hobson's absence by using MoD dentists for the period 6th July to 31st July and 13th August – 28th August. In the two weeks where no cover was provided, emergency dental treatment would be dealt with by the hospital

Stevedore Allowances:

- The DoR and DoOps had discussed the issue surrounding allowances for staff working ship, in line with the allowance paid for Port Security. Stevedore duties are written into contracts for staff employed in Operations, but not those for working Port Security. The monthly allowance paid for Port Security duties was introduced as an incentive to encourage a pool of staff to undertake Port Security duties. It was decided the Port Security allowance would be gradually phased out, by amending contracts for staff working Port Security as and when they expired to include Port Security duties as part of job descriptions.

AIG Vehicle Fleet:

- In response to a question raised by about the process for disposing of old AIG vehicles, the DoR explained that the three former police vehicles were shortly due to be put out for tender and were

currently being prepared. It is AIG's intention to advertise the vehicles along with some old equipment to minimise the administration of running successive tenders. The former police Land Rover will no longer be used by the police constable who has had use of the vehicle since the new police vehicles arrived, which is in line with the stance taken for any other individuals who are awaiting a private vehicle to arrive on the FIRS.

Pierhead – Cleanliness

- In response to a query about the cleanliness of the Pierhead following fishing excursions, the DoR explained that a solution to install a seawater pump to allow for timely cleaning immediately after a fishing excursion would be considered. . It transpired during exploratory conversations with the DoOps that substantially more resource would be required for a pump to be installed, and other solutions would also be considered, whilst being mindful of the cost. A public notice had also been published in the Islander to address the most recent incident where the steps to the wharf were not cleaned. The Pierhead is however, cleaned before every arrival of the RMS.

Update on European Funding:

- We're currently working with SHG in coordinating the submission of EDF11 bids. The receipt of any physical money from the EU may be a number of years away owing to the lengthy submission process and internal machinations of the EU itself. As SHG leads on the bids, we have asked them to provide us with a timetable of what information they require from us, and by when so that we have as much notice as possible in responding. We are however, pushing forward.

Jamie Manson

Director of Resources